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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0126  
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC  
RUEHGH/AMCONSUL SHANGHAI 6109

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SHANGHAI 000229

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DEPT FOR EAP/CM, AND DRL/IRF  
NSC FOR WILDER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 4/19/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KIRF](#) [PINR](#) [CH](#)

SUBJECT: CHINA CHRISTIAN COUNCIL PRESIDENT CAO MEETING

REF: A) SHANGHAI 214 B) KAO-BACCAM 4-18-2007 E-MAIL

CLASSIFIED BY: Simon Schuchat, Deputy Principal Officer, , U.S.  
Consulate Shanghai.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In an April 18 luncheon hosted by the Consul General, China Christian Council (CCC) President Cao Shengjie confirmed that all Protestant churches must go through the China Christian Council/Three-Self Patriotic Movement (CCC/TSPM) in order to register, although these churches did not have to be affiliated with the CCC/TSPM in order to register. Pressed, they could not provide any concrete examples of churches not affiliated with the CCC/TSPM that had been able to register. Rev. Cao was pleased with her recent trip to the United States in which she met with think-tanks, USG officials, NGOs, and church leaders. While disappointed that many interlocutors misunderstood the religious situation in China, she valued her discussions and was open to more exchanges on religion with U.S. organizations. Cao said the Chinese government was becoming more supportive of religious organizations and recognized that religious organizations could play a positive role in promoting social stability and building a "harmonious society." According to Cao, the government's emphasis on "harmonious society" had provided the CCC/TSPM with more space to expand social services.  
End Summary.

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U.S. Visit  
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¶2. (C) The Consul General hosted a lunch for CCC President Cao Shengjie on April 18 to discuss her recent trip to the United States. CCC Executive Deputy Secretary General Chen Meilin, CCC Deputy Secretary General Bao Jiayuan, CCC Training Department Secretary Gu Mengfei, Deputy Principal Officer,

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Political/Economic Section Chief and Poloff also attended the lunch. According to Cao, her U.S. trip was very useful as this was the first time she had met with think-tanks such as the Brookings Institute. She also met with NGOs, Christian Church leaders in New York and Washington D.C., faith-based organizations, U.S. Ambassador for Religious Freedom John

Hanford and Congressman Chris Smith. In addition, she was interviewed by the Associated Press and wrote an editorial for the Washington Post/Newsweek's website on religious issues (<http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/guestvoices>).

13. (C) Cao lamented that many of her U.S. interlocutors had little understanding of the religious situation in China and were surprised to hear that the Protestant Church was growing. For example, one interlocutor was convinced that the Chinese government had deleted words from the Bibles printed and distributed in China. Another believed that all sermons had to be approved by government officials. She noted that this was not true. Even if she did show her sermons to government officials, she observed, they would not understand them. Despite these misunderstandings, she valued her meetings in the United States and welcomed having more exchanges. Consul General noted that he had heard about Rev. Cao's meeting with Ambassador Hanford and inquired about the information centers to facilitate theological exchanges between Chinese and American professors and students via the State Department's International Religious Freedom office and the CCC that was discussed in the meeting (Ref. B). Rev. Cao acknowledged the discussion, but was non-committal about the idea.

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Government Attitudes Shifting?  
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14. (C) Rev. Cao welcomed President Hu Jintao's "harmonious society" concept and noted that like Christianity, it emphasized reconciliation. The concept indicated that government officials were also beginning to recognize that religious groups could play a positive role in promoting stability. The fact that CCC/TSPM was able to expand the Nanjing Seminary and get back its property in Shanghai was an indication that the government attitudes towards religious groups was changing. She added that State Administration for Religious Affairs Director Ye Xiaowen

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gave a three-hour multi-media presentation at the most recent Chinese Peoples Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) meeting in Beijing. This was the first time that there had been a presentation on religion at the CPPCC. Delegates reacted positively to Ye's presentation, and after the session, many approached Rev. Cao to ask about the CCC/TSPM.

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CCC/TSPM's Role In Registration  
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15. (C) According to Rev. Cao, Chinese regulations clearly stated that all religious organizations must go through a religious body in order to register a meeting point. This meant that for protestant churches, they must go through the CCC/TSPM. She added, however, that this was not the only requirement and that organizations must also get permission from other organizations, such as neighborhood committees. When she was head of the Shanghai CCC, a church had problems registering because its neighbors complained about early Sunday morning hymn singing. After some negotiations with the neighborhood committee, the church agreed to move its services to a more secluded location and was able to register.

16. (C) CCC Executive Deputy Secretary General Chen Meilin added that the law also required that the religious organization be headed by a trained minister. The minister did not need to have formal training at a CCC/TSPM seminary. She added that it was the CCC/TSPM's wish to help the government in identifying capable leaders for these organizations. CCC Deputy Secretary General Bao Jiayuan added that 5 or 6 years ago, the government discovered that two churches that had registered were members of Eastern Lightning, which is considered by the Chinese government to be a "cult." The CCC/TSPM's involvement in the registration process was helpful to the government in determining whether a church was affiliated with a cult.

17. (C) Chen said that to her knowledge, it was not necessary for Protestant religious organizations to be affiliated with the CCC/TSPM in order to register. When pressed, neither Chen nor Rev. Cao could provide any concrete examples of non-CCC/TSPM affiliated churches that were able to register. They claimed that there were such churches in Zhejiang province, but could not provide any details. Chen added that the registration issue was handled by provincial CCC/TSPM's and, as representatives of the national CCC/TSPM, they had little information on the issue.

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Shortage of Clergy  
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18. (C) The CCC officials said that one of the greatest challenges currently faced by the CCC/TSPM was the shortage of clergy. Rev. Cao said the CCC/TSPM was trying to encourage young Christians to dedicate themselves to the church. However, this was very difficult. Most new seminarians came from the countryside. Few came from Shanghai, where there was a great deal of pressure for young people to get a high paying job. The CCC/TSPM was now focused on training more lay persons. Rev. Cao said that lay volunteers already played a large role in running churches and this would continue in the long-term. Bao, who also served as Director of the CCC/TSPM Training Department, said that there were two general training programs for lay preachers. Urban volunteers could attend night classes and get a certificate in a few years. Rural residents could attend a one-year course.

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Expanding Social Services  
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19. (C) Rev. Cao noted while the government's emphasis on "harmonious society" had provided the CCC/TSPM with more space, it was vital that the CCC/TSPM manage this opportunity correctly and do everything legally. She added that it was also important for the CCC/TSPM to take advantage of this opportunity and expand its social services. It was important for the CCC/TSPM to be more involved in society and show that Christianity was a positive force. This would allow them to gain the people's trust, which was needed for the CCC/TSPM to develop. Unlike

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Shanghai Catholic Bishop Jin who believed that the Catholic Church would be able to open up schools and clinics in five or six years (reftel), Rev. Cao said it would be impossible for the CCC/TSPM to operate schools as this would violate the separation of church and state. However, CCC/TSPM was already running small clinics. For example, the church in which she presides over in Shanghai has organized free medical consultations for congregants after service for the past 10 years. In Zhejiang, the Zhejiang CCC/TSPM was using its bible-distribution vehicle to transport retired doctors and nurses to the countryside to give free medical care.

110. (C) Chen added that the CCC/TSPM provided training on HIV/AIDs prevention to its pastors last week. The CCC/TSPM was also becoming more involved in assisting autistic children and had provided support to three autistic centers in China, located in Shanghai, Hangzhou and Qingdao. Chen noted that the church had also become more involved in providing counseling training to its pastors. In cooperation with Fuller Seminary, it recently organized a seminar for 20 CCC/TSPM Pastors and 5 American Pastors to discuss counseling. Chen and Bao also attended the seminar and said that American and Chinese pastors were involved in counseling congregants on the many of the same issues, primarily marriage, children's education and employment problems. However, Chinese Pastors worked harder than American pastors because congregants had less access to professional counseling services and came to them with more problems.

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Personnel Moves?  
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¶11. (C) Rev. Cao was very cautious about personnel questions. The 76-year old Cao refused to discuss her retirement plans and who would replace her as CCC President. She also had little to say about Shanghai's new Party Secretary Xi Jinping. She noted that he had yet to meet with local leaders. She did say that Xi's father, Xi Zhongxun was a good man with a good attitude towards religion.

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